

Sermon on Give in Appreciation for your Life

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Text:

John 12:1-8 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "*It was intended* that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

1 Introduction

In December 2007, a British police officer Bryan Murcott suffered a stroke and because of the advanced medical treatment he received at Nottingham University Hospitals the killer condition was stopped right in its tracks. Officer Bryan Murcott expressed his gratitude to the hospital. I am sure he will be grateful for some time to come for his rescue from death.

There are times when you will be walking with a friend or standing with a friend and he/she may pull you out of harms way because of an oncoming car or a ball headed in your direction. You are grateful to the person but the level of appreciation may not be as that of Officer Bryan Murcott who was snatched from the jaws of death.

The severity of your condition when you are rescued may influence the extent to which you show your appreciation to your rescuer. Our passage narrates an episode where Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, showed incredible and unimaginable appreciation to Jesus for rescuing her from the clutches of death and giving her a new lease on life.

2 Mary of Bethany had lived a rough life

The Apostle John tells us that this episode took place in Bethany and identified Mary as the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Dr. Luke narrated a parallel episode where the woman in question is not identified but merely as “a woman who had lived a sinful life.” (Luke 7:37) There are disagreements as to the full identify of this Mary in our passage. The early theologians of the Western church believed that this Mary of Bethany is the same as Mary Magdalene and the same as the sinful woman in Luke’s account. We’ll go with this conclusion as the likely case.

From the biblical accounts, therefore, we see that Mary had lived a rough life. She might have been popularly known in the community to be a sinful woman as we learn from Simon the Pharisee in the Luke account. That means her sins were spectacular; perhaps a prostitute, a drunkard, or witch. Luke tells us in Luke 8:2 that Jesus had cast out seven demons from Mary Magdalene. So Mary was possessed and oppressed by demons. The demonic activity is consistent with the publicly spectacular nature of her sins. Demons make a person commit the vilest of sins. The demonic oppression probably made her a failure at anything she put her hands to. In the society of her time she would have been rejected and denounced.

So, Mary’s life was a mess. She lived in the clutches of Satan without hope and a future. She was a dead woman walking. So also was your life a mess before knowing the Lord. You lived under oppression by Satan and had no hope for a future.

3 Mary had reasons to be eternally grateful to Jesus

3.1 Mary was grateful for her deliverance

Then in strolls the carpenter of Nazareth, God incarnate, God manifest in human form, who touched Mary. At his touch the demons fled. At his touch sickness departed. At his touch death fled. At his touch trouble fled. At his touch failure fled. At his touch despair fled. At his touch frustration fled.

When Mary found Jesus her sanity was restored. When Mary found Jesus her health was restored. When Mary found Jesus her hope was restored. When Mary found Jesus her success was restored. When Mary found Jesus her life was restored.

O, what kind of man is this? What man can snatch you out of the clutches of Satanic oppression? What man can snatch you out of eternal death? It is only Jesus. Only Jesus can

save. Only Jesus can rescue. Only Jesus can deliver. Only Jesus can free. Only Jesus can liberate. Only Jesus can heal.

Mary was enthralled by Jesus' teaching so much that whenever Jesus visited them she sat at his feet to learn from him as recorded in Luke 10:39. Jesus' teaching transformed her life and so she became a committed disciple, a dedicated follower, and useful servant and provider for Jesus.

3.2 You also have reasons to be eternally grateful to Jesus

I know many people are in the Worcester Assembly of The Apostolic Church because they have a concrete testimony as to what God has done in their lives as members of the church. Their testimonies show that once they did bad things but now they do their best, once they were in trouble but now they have peace, once they were a failure but now they are a success, once they made many mistakes but now they make fewer mistakes, once they were frustrated but now they are happy. So, now they are a dedicated members of the church, they defend their church, they support the well-being of their church, they love their church.

Is there anything you can do for your church to show your appreciation? In a similar way Mary asked herself is there anything she can do for her Jesus to show her appreciation?

4 Mary decided to use her money to appreciate Jesus for her new life

4.1 Mary purchased an extremely expensive perfume as her appreciation gift

The Psalmist describes his tough situation in Psalm 116:3 as follows: "The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow." Then in verses 12-14 he continues and says, "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people." This confirms my statement earlier that if you are rescued from death by someone you show them great gratitude. So, it is with this same attitude that Mary decided to appreciate Jesus greatly for rescuing her from the clutches of Satan and giving her a new lease on life.

According to verse 5 of our passage, Mary purchased a perfume for 300 Denarii, which is equivalent to one year's pay in those times. In our times in the USA the average one year pay is about \$50,000. If it was today, this means Mary bought a perfume worth \$50,000! This money represented a substantial amount of Mary's financial resources. But to her this was nothing compared to the ruins she used to call life.

4.2 How much value have you placed on what Jesus has done for you?

How much is the new life Jesus has given you worth? How much is the new peace Jesus has given you worth? How much is the new success Jesus has given you worth? How much is the new self-worth Jesus has given you worth? How much is the new confidence Jesus has given you worth?

Mary gave a lot of money as a gift. How much have you given. Are you the type of person who gives a dollar a week or five dollars a week as your total tithes and offering? This tells the Lord something of your level of acknowledgment of his work in your life and hence your level of appreciation. So, if you are looking for something from the Lord today and you are not receiving it, blame yourself.

4.3 Mary presented her gift from her soul, with submission, and without compulsion

According to verse 3 of our passage, while Jesus was having dinner as the guest of honor in Bethany Mary walked in with this most precious and most expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. She proceeded to massage the perfume into his feet and clean it completely. Then she untied her long hair bent her head down, held her hair and used it to wipe Jesus feet. The manner in which she presented this appreciation gift showed that she was appreciating him from deep within her soul. This is what I call soul-giving. She presented it also with self-abasement using what the Bible calls the glory of the woman, her hair, to wipe feet dirtied by Palestinian streets.

In doing this her manner of presentation showed that she did not feel she was doing Jesus a favor. Sometimes when people give a pastor a gift they give with the attitude that they are doing him a favor. But Mary has the attitude that she was doing herself a favor in appreciating Jesus. O, that we may do ourselves a favor and appreciate Jesus for his goodness to us.

Some people give gifts to the pastor or the church because you have been asked to or it is expected of you. But Mary was not meeting some societal required custom for appreciation or some learned family practice. It was sheer appreciation to one to whom she owed her life, her very existence. Yes, Mary lifted up the cup of salvation and poured the fragrance of life onto the body that was being unknowingly prepared by her for burial as Jesus will say later in verse 7, “*It was intended* that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.”

5 Mary’s gift elicited blessings from Jesus

5.1 Jesus blessed Mary with name immortality and forgiven sins

In her desire to appreciate Jesus and in her act of appreciation God had used her to become part of the salvation story. That is why Mark’s account quotes Jesus as saying, “I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” (Mark 14:9) So, Mary was granted eternal mention by Jesus as indeed we are doing today.

The Luke account quotes Jesus as saying, “I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.” (Luke 7:47) Let me just expound this verse a little. Mary’s sins have been forgiven. That is a great blessing. But then Jesus goes on to state a principle of life which I paraphrase as follows: The person who was in deep sin and trouble appreciates God more than the person who was born into the church. Another way of saying it is that your level of appreciation will show how much you value how far you have come through Jesus Christ.

6 Compared to Mary’s actions Judas’ ingratitude and thievery showed he did not value Jesus’ goodness

Judas Iscariot did not value his salvation nor did he understand the value that Mary placed on her rescue. Perhaps he had not experienced the despair of Satanic oppression. So, he objected to this generous act of Mary according to verse 4-6 of our passage. But God who exposes all thoughts exposed his true intent. Judas Iscariot would have preferred the money be given to him as the treasurer so he can steal it as was his practice.

Are you questioning those who give generously to the church? Are you discouraging people from giving generously to the church? If you are doing that we also have to question your motives. May be you are a child of the devil just as it turned out Judas Iscariot was a child of the devil. I pray that you will prove me otherwise and give generously in recognition of the value of your rescue by Jesus.

7 Conclusion

Mary of Bethany had lived a rough life. She was eternally grateful for her deliverance. You also have reasons to be eternally grateful to Jesus. Mary decided to use her money to appreciate Jesus for her new life. Mary purchased an extremely expensive perfume as her appreciation gift. How much value have you placed on what Jesus has done for you? Mary presented her gift from her soul, with submission, and without compulsion. Jesus blessed Mary with name immortality and forgiven sins. Compared to Mary's actions Judas' ingratitude and thievery showed he did not value Jesus' goodness

I call upon you to give generously to the Lord to show your appreciation for his gracious acts in your life. In doing so you are certain to receive unimaginable blessings from the Lord.